

InVocation 2011 – Getting Ready for Something Big

The Chairman of the Diocesan Vocations Directors for England and Wales draws on his experience to explain why he's looking forward to this summer's national Vocations Weekend.

I sometimes wonder what persuades a young person to get into a car, possibly with a lot of strangers, and travel to a Catholic youth festival – particularly if they rarely go to Mass, and especially if they are not Catholics. I doubt it's the prospect of going home with a "Jesus loves me" t-shirt or a WWJD ("What would Jesus do?") wristband! Last August, for Sophie, at the Youth 2000 festival in Walsingham, it was the chance of spending a few days camping with her four brothers. For Ollie at New Year, it was the invitation to spend time in London, catch up with friends and find a really good steak house!

If you organise a big gathering of young people something is bound to happen. In my parish I know parents who long ago decided the only way to keep their sanity was to decamp to a hotel when a son or daughter was having a birthday part at home. But my experience is that if you add to the mix some catechesis, a lot of Eucharistic Adoration and the chance to go to Confession that "something" can be pretty powerful. For Sophie the experience of Confession changed her life. She hadn't intended to go "because I had no plans or desires to change the things I was doing wrong" but when she did she "finally felt like the person God had made, a person I had lost years ago". For Ollie, who arrived at the retreat proclaiming he definitely wouldn't become a Catholic, an unexpected meeting with a priest had dramatic consequences. As he wrote later, "instead of giving me lots to think about he rather eased the burden of my thoughts... I'm going to become a Catholic this year".

Fellowship, Catechesis, Confession and Adoration: a pretty potent mix! The fellowship is important because it lets young people see they are not alone – and whether the group is a million people gathered for World Youth Day, a thousand for the Youth 2000 Walsingham Retreat, or three hundred in a small Church in Balham, it doesn't really matter. What matters is that they are no longer *alone*. Catechesis is also important not just because young people want answers but because sometimes they need help formulating the questions! Confession is really vital because as young people approach the Lord they become aware of how short their lives fall of his love. They have to be reminded that the devil is more interested in keeping them down when they fall than in any particular sin that might trip them up. And Adoration is important because in the end what matters is that they approach the Lord and begin to open their hearts in a loving dialogue with him.

It is often in Adoration that young people hear the gentle voice of Christ calling them to greater generosity and inviting them to follow him along a particular path. At New Year it was no surprise to find that one lad who spent hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament went home and made an appointment with his vocations director. Another emailed his appreciation and ended with the comment "I won't lie by saying I haven't thought about my vocation".

So I am looking forward to ***Invocation 2011***. It will be only the second time we've had a big national vocations event for young adults and I am sure it will be powerful. It's not a recruitment weekend - so there won't be any child-snatchers or Pied Pipers enchanting young people to follow them! The focus will be on discernment, which is to say it will be on making space for the Lord and listening to his call. It will be hard work to get three hundred young people to attend but if we do I am sure the Church in this country will feel its effect for many years to come.

Fr Stephen Langridge